Instruction of the Student (the Method of Learning)

Ta'lim al-Muta'allim

Tariq at-Ta'-allam

Imam Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani said:
"Learn! for learning is an adornment for one who possesses it, a virtue and a prelude to every praiseworthy action. Profit each day by increasing [your] learning and swimming in the seas of beneficial knowledge. Give yourself up to the study of jurisprudence, for the knowledge of jurisprudence is the best guide to piety and the fear of God, and it is the straightest path to the ultimate goal. It is the milestone leading to the ways of proper guidance; it is the fortress that saves [one] from all hardships. Indeed, one godly person versed in jurisprudence is more powerful against Satan than a thousand [ordinary] worshippers."

Shyakh Burhan-ul-Islam Az-Zarnuji

AUTHOR'S PROLOGUE

In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Mercy-Giving. All praise is for Allah who favored the Children of Adam with knowledge and responsible action above all creation; and may Allah's blessings and peace be upon Muhammad (saw), the master of the Arabs and non-Arabs, and upon his Family and Companions from whom knowledge and wisdom spring.

I have observed in our day many students of learning striving to attain knowledge but failing to do so and are thus barred from its utility and fruition. This is because they have missed the [proper] methods [of learning] and have abandoned its conditions. Anyone who misses his way goes astray and, therefore, does not reach his objective, however modest or glorious.

It is my desire here to elucidate the proven methods of study that myself had either read about in books or heard from my learned and wise teachers. It is my hope that those sincerely interested in this matter would pray for my deliverance and redemption on the Day of Judgment.

The Nature and Merit of Knowledge and Learning

The Prophet (saw) said, *"The quest of knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim man and Muslim woman."* But it is not obligatory for every Muslim to seek all [aspects of] learning, but seek only that which relates to one's standing. It is said that the most meritorious knowledge is that in keeping with one's standing, and the most meritorious action is to maintain one's standing. It is necessary for the Muslim to strive for as much knowledge as he may need in his standing whatever this may be. Since one must perform Prayers [Salat], he must know enough about the Prayer ritual that will help him acquit himself of his obligation. Knowledge of his [other] religious obligations is likewise incumbent upon him, for whatever leads to the fulfillment of a duty is itself a duty and what leads to the establishment of an obligation is itself an obligation. This applies to Fasting; paying Zakat [prescribed charity] if one possesses wealth; and the Pilgrimage [to Makkah] when one is under obligation to perform it. It also applies to trading goods if one is engaged in commerce.

It was once said to Muhammad ibn al-Hasan [The student of Imam Abu Hanifah], May Allah have mercy upon them both, *"Will you not compose a book on asceticism?"* He replied, *"I composed a book on commerce"* meaning that the [true] ascetic is he who is careful to protect himself against dubious and unsanctioned practices in commerce. The same applies to all other occupations and professions. Anyone who works in a given [field] is duty-bound to learn how to guard against what is forbidden therein. This is also obligatory with knowledge of the conditions of the heart, such as complete reliance in Allah (swt), repentance, fear, satisfaction [with Allah's decree] - for this applies [to people] of every walk of life.

The nobility of learning is not foreign to anyone, since it is something peculiar to all humankind. With the exception of knowledge, people - as well as animals to some degree - are associated with several virtues, such as valor, courage, strength, generosity, and compassion. Learning, however, is the exception. Through it, Allah (swt) revealed the preeminence of Adam (pbuh) over the angels whom He (swt) commanded to prostrate themselves before [this first human]. Learning is indeed noble, for it leads to a fear of Allah (swt) which entitles [the believer to receive] Allah's benevolence and eternal bliss [in the Hereafter].

In this vein, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan Abu Abdallah said: *"Learn! For learning is an adornment for one who possesses it, a virtue and a prelude to every praiseworthy action. Profit each day by increasing [your] learning and swimming in the seas of beneficial knowledge. Give yourself up to the study of Jurisprudence [Fiqh], for the knowledge of Jurisprudence is the best guide to piety and the consciousness of Allah (swt), and it is the straightest path to the ultimate goal. It is the milestone leading to the ways of proper guidance; it is the fortress that saves one from all hardships. Indeed, one godly person versed in jurisprudence is more powerful against satan than a thousand [ordinary] worshippers."*

Likewise, [knowledge impacts] all other human characteristics, such as: generosity and avarice; cowardice and courage; arrogance humility; chastity; prodigality and parsimony; and so on. For arrogance, avarice, cowardice, and prodigality (extravagance) are illicit. Only through knowledge of them and their opposites is protection against them possible. Learning, then, is prescribed for all of us. Sayyid Nasir ad-Din Abul-Qasim composed a book on ethics — and a most excellent book did he compose! It is necessary for every Muslim to keep it in mind.

As for learning [the rules that apply to] situations that arise only in certain occasions, this is a collective duty, meaning, when some people fulfill it in a given place, all the other people are excused from this [duty]. But if no one fulfills it, the sin [resulting from this omission] falls on the whole community. It is for the leader, then, to direct and for the community to follow the fulfilling of this [obligation].

It has been said that knowledge of those things that affect a person under all conditions holds a position similar to food: no one can dispense with it. But knowledge of matters affecting a person only in certain occasions, holds a position

equivalent to medicine, which is needed only at stipulated times. But knowledge of astrology holds a position equivalent to disease; its study is prohibited because it is harmful and brings no benefit. It is impossible to flee from the decree of Allah (swt) and His dispensation, [which astrology deals with].

Every Muslim is expected to occupy himself at all times with the remembrance of Allah (swt) the Exalted and with His invocation and supplication; with reading the Quran; giving charity, which wards off calamities; asking for forgiveness and safety in this world and the next. This is so Allah (swt) may shield one from trials and tribulations. For he who is granted [the gift of frequent] invocation will not be denied a favorable response. If calamity is decreed to him, it will inevitably befall him, but Allah (swt) will make the [tribulation] easier for him to bear and will give him the patience by virtue of the invocation.

[Astronomy is discouraged] with the qualification that one is permitted to study just enough of it to determine the qibla and the times of Prayer. The study of medicine is allowed because it deals with accidental causes. Therefore, its study is allowed as is [the study] of other worldly necessities. The Prophet (saw) treated himself medicinally. It is related that Shafi'i (r.a) said, *"science has two branches: the science of legal doctrine, which pertains to religious matter [adyan], and the science of medicine, which pertains to bodies [abdan]. As for commenting on matters of learning, it is a means through which the nature of a propounded subject may become clear."*

Jurisprudence is the science of the fine points of knowledge. Abu Hanifa (r) said, *"Jurisprudence is a person's knowledge of his rights and duties."* He said further, *"The purpose of learning is to act by it, while the purpose of action is to abandon the fleeting [things of this life] for what lasts forever."*

So one must never be heedless of his soul or of what benefits or harms it in this life and in the next. Hence, man must seek out what is useful, while avoiding what is harmful to the [soul], lest his intelligence and his knowledge become weapons against him [in the Hereafter] and thus his punishment is increased. May Allah (swt) preserve us from His wrath and His punishment.

The Purpose of Study

Intention is necessary in the study of any discipline, since every deed is rooted in intention, as attested to in the words of the Prophet (saw), *"Deeds [are measured] by their intentions."* This is an authentic tradition. The Messenger of Allah (swt) also said: *"how many are the deeds which bear the image of the deeds of this world but then become— through their good intention— among the deeds of the Hereafter! And how many are the deeds which bear the image of the deeds of the Hereafter but then become— through their evil intention— among the deeds of this world!"*

It is necessary for the student in his quest for knowledge to strive for the pleasure of Allah (swt), the abode of the Hereafter, the removal of ignorance from himself and from the rest of the ignorant, the revival of religion, and the survival of Islam. For the survival of Islam depends on knowledge. And the disciplined life and piety are not complete when there is ignorance.

Imam Burhan-ud-Din, author of the Hidaya recited a poem of an anonymous author: "*An immoral man of learning is a great evil; - yet a greater evil is an ignoramus leading a godly life. - Both are a great trial everywhere - to whomever clings to his religion.*"

One must intend [with knowledge] to being thankful [to Allah (swt)] for a healthy mind and a sound body; one should not, however, [intend] to attract people toward himself, or reap the vanities of the world, or obtain honors from the king, and the like.

Muhammad ibn al-Hasan (r) said, *"If the people, all of them, were my slaves, I would emancipate them and free myself from being their patron."* This is because he who finds pleasure in knowledge and in acting according to it, rarely does he desire man's [worldly] possessions.

Imam Qiwam-ul-Din Hammad ibn Ibrahim ibn Ismail as-Saffar al-Ansari recited a poem of Abu Hanifa (r): *"Whoever strives for knowledge for the Hereafter - obtains great gain in righteousness. - But he is in utter loss who seeks [knowledge] - to obtain advantage over people!"*

[This is true] with the possible exception of one who seeks position in order to command what is good and forbid what is evil, and in order to promote the truth and strengthen religion— but never in order to satisfy one's ego and desires. [The regression of selfish aims] becomes more possible the more [the learned] undertakes to enjoin what is good and forbid evil.

It is essential for one who strives for knowledge to reflect on this. One should seek knowledge with great [personal] assiduity and not apply it to this base, small, and perishable world.

[As the poet said]: *"This world is more worthless than the worthless, - and its lover is baser than the base. - It renders people deaf by its magic and makes them blind - so they become perplexed with no guide."*

It behooves one who seeks knowledge not to debase himself by desiring what should not be desired; and [it behooves him] to abstain from that which degrades learning and its bearers. One should also be modest, for modesty lies between arrogance and self-abasement. Chastity, too, is like this. This can be learned from [the book] Kitab al-Akhlaq [A Treatise on Human Character].

Imam Rukn al-Islam, who is known as al-Adlb al-Mukhtar, recited for me a poem that he himself composed: *"Indeed, modesty is a quality of the God-conscious, - and by it do the pious ascend [to sublime heights]. - A wondrous thing is the wondering of the ignorant - about his condition, whether he is happy or wretched. - Or [his wondering] about how his life will end, or whether his soul - on the day [of his death] will descend or ascend. - Truly, pride belongs to our Lord, an attribute - peculiar to Him. So avoid it and fear Allah (swt)."*

Abu Hanifa (r) yet said to his companions, *"Make your turbans ample and enlarge your sleeves."* He said this so that scholarship and its bearers will not be slighted [by people]. And it is necessary for him who seeks knowledge to acquire the Kitab al-Wasiyya [The Bequest], in which Abu Hanifa (r) wrote to Yusuf ibn Khalid as-Samti when he returned to his people. Our late teacher, Ali ibn Abi Bakr [al-Marghinani], commanded me to write out [Kitab al-Wasiyya] upon returning to my country, which I did. He who teaches higher levels of knowledge and he who gives legal opinions [a mufti] cannot dispense [with this book] in his dealings with people.

The Choices in Learning

When undertaking the pursuit of knowledge, it is necessary to choose among the branches of learning those that are the most beneficial to oneself. One should [also] select what is essential according to the stage one has reached in his religious development. And finally, [one should] choose what will be essential to one in the future. [With this, the individual] will perfect himself in the knowledge of the oneness of Allah (swt) and learn about Allah (swt) the Exalted through [sound] evidence, for the faith of one who blindly follows authority, even though it may be correct in our view, is still defective because of his failure to seek out proofs.

It is essential to choose established traditions before new things. It is said, *"Cleave to established traditions, while avoiding new things."* Beware of becoming engrossed in those disputes which come about after one has cut loose from the traditional authorities. For [such dispute] keeps the student away from knowledge, wastes way his life, and leaves him with [nothing but] solitude and hostility. [The prevalence of dispute] is one of the indications of [the coming of] the Hour and is the annihilation of knowledge and doctrine. This is supported by a statement [of the Prophet (saw)].

Regarding the choice of a teacher, it is important to select the most learned, the most pious, and the most advanced in years. In this way did Abu Hanifa (r) chose Hammad ibn Abi Sulayman (r) after due deliberation and reflection. He said, *"I found him venerable, with a serious demeanor, gentle, and patient."* He [also said], *"I was on safe ground with Hammad ibn Abl Sulayman, and [under him] did I grow*." Then he stated: *"I heard a sage from Samarqand say, 'Indeed, one student consulted me about seeking knowledge, and [after the consultation] he decided to take a journey to Bukhara in order to acquire learning [there].' "*

It is necessary to ask advice in all matters. Indeed, Allah (swt) commanded [even] His Messenger to seek counsel, although there was no one more intelligent than the Prophet (saw). Nevertheless [the Prophet (saw)] was instructed to consult with others. So indeed, he sought advice from his Companions in all affairs including domestic matters. Ali ibn Abi Talib stated, *"No man ever perished from seeking advice."* It is said [that people are divided into the following]: a man, a half man, and nothing. A man is one who is of sound judgment and consults [others] . A half man is one who is of sound judgment but does not seek advice, or seeks advice but is not of sound judgment. One who is nothing is a person who is neither sound in judgment nor one who seeks advice. Ja'far as-Sadiq said to Sufyan al-Thawri (May Allah be pleased with them both), *"Seek advice in your affairs from those who are God-conscious. The quest of knowledge is among the most exalted and difficult tasks; thus seeking advice [in acquiring knowledge] is most important and urgent."*

Al-Hakim [as-Samarqandi] stated, *"If you come to Bukhara do not hasten between various learned masters. Rather, be patient a couple of months until you reflect concerning the choice of a teacher."* For if you come to a learned man and begin to study with him right away, his teaching may often not be to your liking. [If this is the case] you leave him and move on to another teacher. But no blessing will come to you by taking up your studies in this manner. So reflect two months about the [right] choice of a teacher and seek advice so that you do not have to leave and withdraw from him. [It is better] that you remain with him until your studies have prospered and you profit a great deal from the knowledge you have attained.

Know that patience and perseverance comprise the foundation of all [important] matters, but these [two qualities] are rare, as it is said in a verse [of poetry], *"The effort in the attainment of glory wearies - but persistence is rare among men."*

It is said that courage is having endurance for [even] one hour. Hence, it is necessary for the pursuer of knowledge to be firm and exert patience with his teacher and his text so as to not abandon [his studies] incomplete. [Also exert patience] with one discipline in order not to be distracted by another before the first is completed. [Likewise have patience] with one land so as to not migrate to another unnecessarily. For all these changes disturb one's affairs, preoccupy the heart, lose time, and injure the teacher.

It is also essential to be strong in abstaining from what one's soul and desires bid one to do. A poet said, *"Indeed, desire is baseness in its essence, - and the victim of any desire is the victim of baseness."* So be patient in calamity and affliction. It is said, *"The treasure of good bounty lies on the arches of calamities*." I recited a poem which is said to be by Ali ibn Abi Talib (r): *"The pursuit of knowledge is not carried on without six things which I shall inform you of through words that are clear: Ingenious acumen, fervent desire, patience, sufficient sustenance, guidance of a teacher, and length of time."*

As to the selection of one's companions, it is necessary to choose one who is diligent, religious, and gifted with a good character and understanding; and flee from one who is indolent and negligent, verbose, corrupt, and a troublemaker. It is said in a verse of poetry: *"Do not inquire about a man, but observe his companion, - for indeed one companion imitates the other; - And if the companion is evil, then quickly shun him, - but if [the companion] is good, then associate with him - In this way you will be led in the right direction."*

Another poem was recited to me: *"Do not associate yourself with a companion indolent in his ways. - How often through the corruption of another man is a pious man corrupted? - Contagion spreads quickly from the lazy to the [lively] one - just as when one places a [burning] coal in ashes, the fire is allayed (lessened).*"

The Prophet (saw) said, *"Everyone born [into the world] is born in fitra [natural state of belief], until his parents make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian."* And it is said according to the wisdom of the Persians: *"A bad friend is worse than an evil snake. - [I swear] by the pure essence of the Eternal God! - A bad companion leads you toward Hell; - take a good companion in order to secure success."*

And it is said: *"If you truly seek knowledge from those who possess it, - or from a witness who tells you about what you know not; - then appraise the country by its reputation - and the companion by his companion."*

Respecting Knowledge and Those Who Possess It

Know that in the pursuit of knowledge, one does not acquire learning nor profit from it unless one holds knowledge in esteem and those who possess it. So one [must] esteem and venerate the teacher. It is said that he who attains knowledge does not do so except through respect, while he who fails [in this goal] does so only by ceasing to respect and venerate learning and its bearers. It is stated that respect is preferable to obedience, for you do not perceive a man becoming an unbeliever through his disobedience [of Allah's revelation], but by [his] mocking of it and by discarding reverence [for it]. One aspect of venerating knowledge consists in holding the teacher in esteem. Ali ibn Abi Talib (r) said: *"I am the slave of him who teaches me one letter of the alphabet. If he wishes, he may sell me; if he so desires, he may set me free; and if he cares to, he may deploy me as a slave."*

On this subject I myself have composed these lines: *"I have observed that the greatest duty is that - which is due to the teacher, - and this is the most necessary thing for each Muslim to observe. - It is a duty to offer him a thousand dirhams as a sign of honor - for his instruction in one single letter of the alphabet."*

He who teaches you one letter of what you need for your religious instruction, he is your father in religion. Our teacher, the venerable Imam Sadid-ud-Din al-Shirazi, used to say: *"Our elders stated that whoever wishes his son to become learned will have to cultivate traveling scholars, esteem them, venerate them, as well as offer them remuneration. If one's son does not become learned, then one's grandson will."*

In venerating the teacher, avoid walking in front of him and sitting in his place. And do not begin speaking in his presence without his permission, and do not speak to any great extent before him without his permission. One should not ask him any [question] when he is weary. One should observe the correct time and refrain from knocking on [his] door, but have patience until [the teacher] comes out. In short, one should seek his approval, avoid his resentment, and obey his commands in those things which are not sinful in the eyes of Allah (swt), for [the Prophet (saw) said], *"Never should a created man be obeyed in rebellion against the Creator."* The Prophet (saw) also said, *"Indeed, the most evil man is he who relinquishes his religion for the material world of other men. In this, he is sinning against Allah (swt)."*

Revering the teacher includes respecting the teacher's children and those related to him. Imam Burhan-ud-Din, author of the Hidaya, narrated that one of the greatest imams of Bukhara used to sit when lecturing and at times rose in the middle of his discourse. When asked the reason [for rising] he explained, *"The son of my teacher was playing with the boys on the street and sometimes came to the gate of the Mosque. As often as I saw him, I arose for him in order to honor my teacher."*

The judge Imam Fakhr-ud-Din al-Arsabandi was the chief Imam in Marw; the Sultan held him in the highest regard. Fakhr-ud-Din frequently said, *"I have reached this rank only by serving my teacher, for I have served my teacher, Imam Abu Zayd al-Dabusi. I both waited on him and prepared his food for thirty years, but never ate anything thereof."* Imam al-Hulwani left Bukhara and settled for some time in a certain town because of an incident which befell him. His students visited him with the exception of Imam Abu Bakr al-Zaranji. When he met him, al-Hulwani asked him, *"Why did you not come to visit me?"* Abu Bakr replied, *"I was occupied serving my mother."* Al-Hulwani answered, *"You will obtain a livelihood but you will not attain the splendor of teaching."* And this is just what happened, for [Abu Bakr] lived most of his life in villages and was unable to carry on lectures. Thus one is deprived of the fruits of learning when he slights his teacher, and only in a small way does he profit from his knowledge: Neither the teacher nor the physician advises you unless he is honored. So bear your disease patiently if you have wronged its healer and be satisfied with your ignorance if you have wronged a teacher.

It is reported that Caliph Harun al-Rashid sent his son to [the learned man] al-Asmaʻi to take up the study of [grammar] and adab. One day [the Caliph] saw [al-Asmaʻa] purifying himself and washing his feet, while the son of the Caliph poured water over his feet. So [the Caliph] reprimanded al-Asmaʻa in this manner saying, *"I sent [my son] to you to learn grammar and be instructed in adab, so why is it that you don't ask him to pour water with one hand and wash your foot with the other hand?"*

One way of holding knowledge in esteem is through veneration of the Book [the Quran]. It then behooves the student not to pick up the Book unless he is in a state of [ritual] purity. It has been told that Imam al-Hulwani said: *"I obtained [my] learning by means of veneration, for I never took up paper unless I was pure [in a state of wudu]."* Imam as-Sarakhsi had abdominal issues and it was his habit to incessantly recite the Quran at night. So he purified himself seventeen times [out of bodily necessity] in order not to resume recitation without being pure. He did this since learning is light and purification is light; thus the light of learning is increased by [purification].

The required veneration [of the Book] includes the obligation not to stretch out one's foot toward the Book; to place books of [Quran] interpretation above other books; and not to place anything else above the Book. Our teacher Imam Burhan-ud-Din often narrated that when a certain Shaykh [saw] a scholar putting an inkwell on the Book, he said to him, *"You will reap no fruit from your labors."* It was our teacher known as Qadikhan who used to say, *"If one does not [break the rules for handling the Quran] or intend to treat the Book with disdain there is no harm in so doing, but it is better to guard oneself against [the possibility of such a breach of rules*]."

The required veneration [for the Quran] includes the duty to write the Book beautifully and not in a cramped style, and not to leave notes in the margin except when it cannot be helped. When Abu Hanifa (r) saw someone writing the Book in a cramped style, he said, *"Do not cramp your handwriting. If you live, you will regret it; and if you die, you will be taken to task."* It is told that Imam Majd-ud-Din as-Sarakhsi stated, *"Let us not write in a cramped style lest we regret it; and let us not make selections [abridgments] lest we regret it; and let us not omit to collate [what we have written] lest we regret it."*

Veneration of learning includes veneration of one's companions in the quest for knowledge and of one's fellow [students] during a lecture session. Adulation is blameworthy except in the quest of knowledge; for [at times, it becomes] necessary to praise one's teacher and one's fellow students in order that one can profit from their learning.

In seeking knowledge, it is essential to listen to [words of] knowledge and wisdom with reverence and veneration, even if one hears the same question and same words a thousand times. It is said that when one's respect [for knowledge] after [hearing it] a thousand times is not equal to his respect the first time [he heard it], he is not worthy of knowledge.

In seeking knowledge, it is necessary that one not choose by himself the kind of learning to pursue, but to entrust the matter to the teacher. For indeed the teacher has gained more experience in these matters, such that he is more knowledgeable of what is needed for each person and what is suitable to the nature [of each student]. Imam Burhan-ud-Din used to say, *"In the quest for learning in early times, the students entrusted their affairs of learning to their teacher, and in this manner did they reach their goals and aims. But nowadays they make their own choices and fail to reach their objectives in religious and legal knowledge."* It is related that Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari (r) came to Muhammad ibn al-Hasan (r) with the Book of Prayer [probably a book on Sacred Law]. And Muhammad ibn al-Hasan (r) said to him, *"Go out and learn the science of Tradition [Hadith],"* for he assessed that this [field of] knowledge was better suited to

his nature. So [Bukhari] indeed studied the field of Prophetic Tradition and finally became superior to all the other principal scholars of Tradition.

It further behooves the student not to sit too close to the teacher during a lecture except when necessary. In fact, it is important that the pupils sit in a semi-circle at a certain distance from the teacher; this is more appropriate [in showing] due respect. And it is necessary in the quest of knowledge to be on one's guard from shameful traits of character, for they are the howling dogs of the spirit. The Messenger (saw) has said, *"The angels do not enter a home in which there is a dog or a picture."*

It is said, *"Knowledge is hostile to the haughty youth, just as torrential rain is hostile to the highlands."* It is also said, *"All glory is attained by exertion, not by luck. Is luck without exertion of any glory? How many a slave ranks with the free, and how many a freeborn ranks with the slave!"*

Earnestness, Perseverance, and Assiduity

Earnestness, perseverance, and assiduity are indispensable in the quest for knowledge. This is indicated in the Quran, in the very words of Allah (swt), *"Those who have earnestly striven in Our cause, We shall surely guide them to Our ways*" (29:69); and *"O John [Yahya], take the Book with power"* (19:12). It is said that he who seeks something and is industrious [in so doing] shall find it; and he who knocks at the door and is persistent shall enter. And it is said that you will reach what you desire [only] to the extent that you pursue it. It is said as well that the industriousness of three kinds of people is essential in [the pursuit of] knowledge and understanding: the student, the teacher, and the father, if he is among the living.

Imam Sadid-ud-Din ash-Shirazi once recited to me a poem composed by Imam Shafi'i (r): *"Earnest application makes accessible every remote affair, - and industriousness opens every locked door. - The creature of Allah (swt) most worthy of grief - is a man of high aspirations who is worn out - by a life of straightened circumstances. - Proof of divine destiny and its wisdom - are in the afflictions of the wise and the easy life of the fool. - Lack of wealth will nourish intellectual power. - They are opposites; how far apart are the two!"*

A poem by another author was recited to me: *"Do you desire to become learned and skilled in debate - by any means except labor? There are various kinds of stupidity. - No gain of riches is possible without difficulties - which you must take upon yours lf. - How, then, is it with learning?"*

Abu'l-Tayyib [al-Mutanabbi] said, "*I do not see a fault among the faults of men like the imperfection of those able to reach perfection."* It is essential in the seeking of knowledge to maintain a vigil throughout the nights, as the poet says: *"Through much toil do you gain high distinction. - So he who seeks learning keeps awake during the night. - You strive after glory but then you sleep at night? - He who seeks pearls immerses himself in the sea. - The height of [the builder's] blocks depends on the height of his aspirations; - a man's dignity rests on his nightly vigils. - Whoever desires elevation without fatigue - wastes his life in the quest for the absurd. - I have forsaken sleep at night to win Your satisfaction, O Lord of Lords. - So let me attain the acquisition of knowledge - and let me reach the utmost degree of accomplishment."*

It is said, *"Take night as your camel; with it you shall attain your hope."* I myself made up a poem on this theme: *"He who desires to carry out all his aspirations should use his nights as a camel on his road to reach them. Diminish your food in order to maintain a vigil — if you wish, my friend, to attain perfection."*

It is said, *"He who keeps watch at night will rejoice in his heart during the day."* In the search for knowledge, it behooves one to persevere in study and repetition, both at the beginning of the night and at its end, for the time between dusk and the hour of dawn is a blessed time. On this subject, verses have been composed: *"O seeker of knowledge, occupy yourself with reverence for Allah (swt), - avoid sleep and leave off satisfying your hunger; - And persevere in study— do not cease from it, - for learning exists and grows through study."*

[In the quest for learning], one must make use of the days of early youth and adolescence. It is said, *"By the amount of work [you do] will you obtain what you strive for. So he who strives for a goal stays up by night. Make use of the days of early youth for verilv the period of youth does not remain with you."* But [in order to pursue knowledge] one should not exhaust nor weaken oneself so that one cuts oneself off from work. On the contrary, one should practice temperance in this respect, for moderation is one great source of all success. The Messenger (saw) said, *"Indeed, this religion of mine is solidly grounded, so enter into it with moderation."* Do not make hateful to yourself the service of Allah (swt). He who makes plants grow does not cut up the ground nor does he wholly neglect it. The Prophet (saw) also said: *"Your mind is your riding-beast, hence use it with moderation."* In seeking knowledge, it is important to aspire to the highest level of learning, since man flies by his aspirations as a bird flies with its wings.

The famous Arab poet Abu'l-Tayyib [al-Mutanabbi] said: "Decisions are arrived at according to the stature of deciders - generous deeds according to the openhandedness of the generous - And small things are great in the eyes of the small person, - and great things are small in the eyes of the great.

The chief aids in the acquisition of things are industriousness and high ambition. He who aspires to memorize all of the books of Muhammad ibn al-Hasan (r), [for example], and adds [to this ambition] industriousness and perseverance, will surely retain the greater part of these books or at least a half. But if one has high aspirations but does not have industriousness, or has industriousness but lacks high aspirations, he will not attain except a small amount of knowledge.

Imam Radi-ud-Din an-Naysaburi recalled in the book Makarim al-Aklaq [Excellent Character] that when Dhul-Qarnayn intended to make an expedition in order to become master of the East and the West, he consulted learned men, *"Why shall I make an expedition for such a portion of [my] empire? For the world is small and shall perish, and rule of this world is a contemptible thing. So this [expedition] is not a noble way to exert oneself."* However, the learned men replied, *"Make the expedition in order that you may have possession of the present world and the hereafter."* So he said, *"This is good."* And the Messenger (saw) said, *"Surely Allah (swt) loves noble undertakings and abhors contemptible ones."*

It is said, *"Do not make haste in your affairs but proceed slowly with them. For nothing will straighten your rod like a slow fire."*

It is reported that Abu Hanifa (r) said to Qadi Abu Yusuf (r), *"You were unlearned, but assiduity in your studies made you emerge [from ignorance]. But beware of laziness, for it is misfortune and a great calamity."*

The venerable Imam Abu Nasr as-Saffar al Ansari stated, *"O my soul, my soul, do not become lax in your work of piety, justice, and good works [carried on] in calmness. For each one who acts in a lazy manner has afflictions and unhappiness."*

There came to me a poem in the same vein: *"Let go of laziness and slovenly ways, O my soul- otherwise you will bring on you contempt. - For I do not see that the lazy have a share in anything, - but regret and frustration of hopes."*

And it is said: *"How much shame, weakness, and regret is born to men from laziness. Beware of laziness in investigating the doubtful and the exceptional that come to your knowledge."*

It is said that laziness issues from the paucity [scarcity] of meditation on the virtues of knowledge and its merits. So it is necessary when embarking on study to bestir [start to be active] oneself for the acquisition [of knowledge] and [prod oneself] to industriousness and perseverance in the meditation of the merits of learning. For truly knowledge remains, while riches disappear, just as the Commander of Believers, Ali ibn Abi Talib (r), said, *"We are satisfied with the allotment decreed by [Allah (swt)] the All-Powerful. To us, [He gives] knowledge, and to the enemies, wealth. For wealth perishes, while knowledge lasts— never vanishes."*

Good renown [being popular] derives from useful knowledge and lasts after one's death. Indeed, this is life everlasting. Imam Zahir-ud-Din Hasan ibn ʻAli, known as al-Marghinani, recited to us, *"The ignorant are dead before their death while the learned live even though they are dead."*

The Shaykh al-Islam Burhan-ud-Din recited to us, "ignorance is a death before death to those that harbor it; and their bodies are graves before the graves. A man who does not live by knowledge is dead."

Someone else said, *"The master of knowledge lives on forever after his death, though his bones rot under the dust. But the ignorant is dead while he still walks on the earth. He is thought to be alive but he is non-existent."*

Another poet said, *"The life of the heart is knowledge, so seek it; - and the death of the heart is ignorance, so shun it."*

Imam Burhan-ud-Din recited for us, *"Behold! Learning occupies the highest rank, while inferior to it is the grandeur of the greatest in a princely procession. For the man of learning, his splendor continues to multiply, while the ignorant man just merely below the ground after his death. No one who ascends the ladder of empire and of generalship can hope for the heights [of the learned]."*

I shall dictate to you some of the things of which [knowledge] consists. So listen! It is not possible for me to relate all the virtues of learning:

"[Knowledge] is the most perfect light which guides people away from blindness, while the ignorant man passes his life in dark shades."

"[Knowledge] is the summit of heights which protects one who seeks refuge in it; and by its auspices does one go along with security."

"Through [knowledge], one is taken into [divine] confidence, while [ordinary] men live in their heedless."

"Through [knowledge], one has hope [for eternal life] even while the soul remains locked within the breast [while still alive]."

"Through [knowledge], man intercedes for the one who, out of rebellion [against Allah (swt)], descends to the very bottom of Hell, the most terrible of punishments."

"So he who aspires to learn, aspires to all necessary things. And he who possesses it, possesses all those things that are worthy of quest. This is the honor of honors, O man of intelligence! So when you have won it, make light of the [worldly] honors. For if the world seems to escape you, as well as its pleasures, then blink your eyes at them, for knowledge is the best of gifts."

[This] poem was recited to me by some other poet, *"Since the learned man is held in honor through his knowledge, - knowledge of the Law is the most worthy of honors. - How much fragrance does it emit, unlike [fleeting] musk! - And how high does it soar, unlike [the greedy] hawk!"*

A poet recited yet another poem to me, *"Learning is the most precious thing you could store. He who takes up learning will never have his honor effaced. So acquire for yourself those matters of which you were once ignorant. For the beginning and the end of knowledge is happiness."*

The joys of knowledge, learning, and insight are sufficient incentive for intelligent men to acquire knowledge. Laziness is often derived from a great deal of phlegm and bodily fluid; so the way to diminish [laziness] is by a reduction of food.

It is said that seventy prophets, peace be upon them, agreed that forgetfulness comes from an abundance of phlegm, while an abundance of phlegm comes from an abundance of drinking of water; and an abundance of drinking of water comes from an abundance of eating. Dry bread cuts out phlegm and so does the eating of dried figs with unseasoned bread, such that it eliminates the necessity for drinking water and thereby [decreasing] phlegm. Using the tooth-stick [siwak] reduces phlegm, increases memory, and the aptitude for speaking well. It is also a practice prescribed by the Sunna [the tradition of the Prophet (saw)], for it increases the efficacy of Prayer and the reading of the Quran. The way to reduce eating is to reflect on the advantages of eating in small amounts, namely, wellbeing, chastity, and honor.

On this subject, it is said, *"Disgrace — indeed disgrace and utter disgrace — is man's affliction on account of food."*

The Prophet (saw) is reported to have said, "Three kinds of people are beyond doubt hateful to Allah (swt): the glutton, the miser, and the arrogant." Reflection [on diet] reveals the ill effects of excessive eating, for this is unhealthy and dulling to the character. It is said, *"The [full] stomach destroys intelligence."* Through [excessive eating] there is also loss of wealth; and eating beyond satiety is entirely harmful. By [excessiveness in eating] punishment is merited in the Hereafter, and the glutton is detestable to [righteous] souls.

The correct way of reducing food is to eat oily dishes, as well as the most delicate and most desirable food in small amounts. One should not eat with a voracious appetite. However if one has an honest objective in eating much — Like [eating a lot] to become stronger in order to fast, pray, engage in Jihad, and do difficult work — this is permissible.

The Beginning of Study, Its Amount, and Its Organization

Our teacher, Burhan-ud-Din, used to begin his studies on Wednesday. He used to relate [the following tradition he heard] from his teacher, Qiwam-ud-Din Ahmad ibn Abd al-Rashid, *"I heard from a certain man, in whom I have confidence, that Imam Yusuf al-Hamadani undertook all his best work on Wednesdays. [He did] this because Wednesday is the day in which light was created and it is a day injurious to the ways of the disbelievers, though it is a providential [devine] day for the believer."*

On the subject of how much to study in the initial stages [of learning], Abu Hanifa (r) quoted Imam Umar (son of the Imam Abu Bakr al-Zaranji), who said: *"Our elders stated that it is necessary that the length of study for the beginner be an amount in which he can retain in his memory after two repetitions. Every day he should increase [the measure of] his recall by one word, so that even if the duration and quantity of his study become large, it would [still] remain possible for him to recall [his lessons by repeating them] twice. He would thus increase [his capacity] gently and gradually."*

But if the length of study in the beginning is long such that it becomes necessary to make ten repetitions [of the material], then [the learner] may also proceed in this [methodical] fashion. [He can do this] because he becomes accustomed to this [amount] and does not break this habit without great effort. It is said that learning is [worth] one letter, while repetition is [worth] a thousand letters.

It is necessary to begin [one's study] with matters that are more readily understood. Imam Sharaf-ud-Din al-Uqayll used to say, *"In my opinion the right procedure [in study] is what our elders practiced. They chose to begin with a few subjects of*

broad content because these are more readily understood and retained; they are less fatiguing and occur frequently among men."

It is [also] essential to write down an extract [of the material] after memorizing it and then repeat it often, for this methodl is indeed profitable. But the student should not write anything unless it is fully understood for [writing down of undigested matter] blunts the character, ravages intelligence, and wastes time. It is important that the student exert himself strenuously to understand what he is offered by the teacher, applying intelligence, reflection, and much repetition. For if reading is limited but repetition and reflection are extensive, then [the student] will attain a firm grasp and understanding [of the material]. It is said that memorizing two letters is better than listening to two loads [of books]; moreover, comprehending two letters is better than memorizing two such loads. But if comprehension bypasses one and he does not exert oneself [to repeat the lesson at least] one or two times [to learn it], one [becomes vulnerable to] getting accustomed to this [negligence], such that even an easy lesson will not be comprehended. So it is necessary not to neglect gaining understanding [of one's subject matter] and to do one's work diligently, while praying to Allah (swt) the Exalted and beseeching Him humbly [for knowledge]. Indeed, Allah (swt) answers those who call upon Him and does not disappoint those who place hope in Him.

Imam Qiwam-ud-Din Hammad ibn Ibrahim ibn Isma'il as-Saffar al-Ansari recited a poem to us composed by al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Sarakhsi, who had it dictated to him: *"Serve knowledge in a way useful [to you] and keep its lesson alive by praiseworthy action. - And if you do not retain anything, repeat it, then affirm it in a manner most energetic. - Then make notes about it that you may return to it and always study it. - Then when you are sure it will not slip from your grasp, go on to something new. - But at the same time repeat what had preceded; and establish firmly [in your mind] the import of this increase [in knowledge]. - Discuss with people subjects of learning in order that you may live. - Do not keep yourself away from the enlightened. - If you conceal knowledge, you will be forgotten so that you see no one but the ignorant and the ill-bred. - Then you will be bridled with a fire on the Day of Resurrection and will be made to burn with a vehement chastisement."*

It is necessary to pursue knowledge by means of discussion, debate, and inquiry. It is [also] essential that [one do these things] with fairness, circumspection, and deliberation. One must fortify himself against altercation and anger. [It is true that] discussion and argument are [a kind of] consultation; and consultation aims at establishing the truth. This, however, is attained only through circumspection, the avoidance of violent dispute, and fairness — not through hostility and anger. For [argument and discussion] aimed at forcing [one's views upon another] and crushing an opponent are illicit. They are permissible only when they seek to bring out the truth. Ruse and tricks are not admissible [in discussion] except when the opponent himself is quibbling and is not really seeking the truth.

Muhammad ibn Yahya used to say when encountering a problematic question [in a debate] and an answer does not readily present itself to him, *"What you have compelled me to admit [appears] to be necessarily [true], and I shall examine it further: And above all who have knowledge is [Allah (swt)] the All-Knowing (Quran, 12:76)."*

The usefulness of posing and discussing questions is greater than the usefulness of mere repetition, since in [discussing questions] there is repetition and an additional element. It is said that posing questions for an hour is better than a month of repetition; but this holds good only when the discussion is carried on with someone who has a just and candid nature. Beware of an argument with an adversary who is a quibbler of a perverse nature, for [undesirable] character creeps into [one] stealthily; habits are contagious and proximity [to those of lowly character] leaves its traces.

It is further said that knowledge has this condition [of being contagious] for the one who serves it, such that it should make all men the servants of knowledge.

It is incumbent upon the student that he ponder long and often on the more subtle matters of knowledge and that he accustom himself to this; for only by reflection can subtle problems be solved. For this reason it is said, *"Reflect and you will reach a solution"* But it is essential to reflect before speaking in order [to say] what is correct. Speech is like an arrow; it is necessary to aim it by way of reflection before uttering anything. This way one hits the target. Regarding the principles of jurisprudence [usul-ull-fiqh], it is a major axiom [maxim] that the discourse of a jurist in debate be based on thorough reflection. It is said, moreover, that the first principle of intelligence is practicing discourse with consideration and circumspection. Somebody said, *"I recommend to you five things when composing your discourse — that is, if you are obedient to a well-meaning advisor. Do not neglect the purpose of the discourse, its time, its quality, its quantity, and its place."*

Under all circumstances and times [the student| should endeavor to profit from everybody present. The Messenger (saw) said, *"Wisdom is a wandering beast of the believer wherever he finds it, he should seize it."* It is said, *"Seize whatever is clear and discard whatever is turbid."* I heard Imam Fakhr-ud-Din al-Kasani say that Abu Yusuf (r) had a servant who [for a time] was given in guardianship to Muhammad [ibn al-Hasan] (r), who said to her, *"Do you remember anything*

learned that Abu Yusuf said?" She said: *"Nothing except that he used to repeat frequently: A share in tribal holdings is not transmissible by will."* So Muhammad remembered this from her. It so happened that this question had long perplexed Muhammad ibn Hasan, but his doubt was removed by the statement. He then realized that knowledge could be attained from everyone. It is for this reason that Abu Yusuf, when he was asked, *"How do you attain your knowledge?"* he said, *"I never scorn to profit [by anyone] nor am I stingy in profiting [others]."*

It was said to Ibn Abbas, *"In what way did you pursue knowledge?"* He answered, *"With the aid of a tongue fond of asking and a heart full of good sense."* Students of knowledge are called 'What-do-you-sayers' simply because in their early days they often ask *"What do you say concerning this question?"* Abu Hanifa (r) used to study by posing questions often and discussing them in his shop when he was a cloth merchant. Through this example does one recognize that the acquisition of knowledge and learning can be linked to the earning of a livelihood. Abu Hafs al-Kabir used to work for a living and at the same time repeat assiduously [his studies].

If a seeker of knowledge must make a living to support his family and other [dependents], then he should work for his livelihood and [at the same time] repeat and discuss [his lessons]. [This he should do] instead of being lazy. One who is of sound mind and body, there is no excuse [in poverty] to neglect study and learning, for no one was poorer than Abu Yusuf, and this did not prevent him from learning. But what of the person who possesses much wealth? *"Let wealth that is righteously attained benefit the righteous man"* [Hadith, Musnad Imam Ahmad] who plods on in the path of learning. It was said to a learned man, *"How did you acquire knowledge?"* He said: *"Through a rich father. By means of his [wealth] he supported learned and good men. This was the reason that my knoeledge increased."*

Gratitude for the blessing of intelligence and knowledge also increases knowledge. Imam ul-A'zam Abu Hanifa (r) said, *"I acquired knowledge by praising Allah (swt) and thanking Him. As often as I understood an item of learning and apprehended a point of law or a nugget of wisdom, I proclaimed 'Al-hamdu lil-laah' subsequently, my knowledge was increased."* As such, it is necessary in the quest for learning to occupy oneself with giving thanks by way of the tongue, the heart, the hands, and one's wealth.

[It is important] to realize that understanding, knowledge, and good fortune come from Allah (swt), as well as from asking Allah (swt) for guidance by supplicating him and beseeching Him. For [Allah (swt)] is the One who guides those who seek His guidance.

So the followers of the truth-who are the followers of the Prophet's way [sunnah] and the community of believers - seek the truth from Allah (swt) who Himself , the Truth, the Elucidator, the Guide, and the Protector [against error]. So Allah (swt) leads [followers of the truth] and protects them from error. However, people of misguidance admire their own intelligence and their opinions. They seek the truth [only] from mortals who are weak and rely only on reasoning [without revelation from Allah (swt)]. For human reasoning does not encompass everything in all respects, just as vision does not reveal all things to the sight. These people are incapable [of the highest truth]. Consequently, they go astray and cause others to stray [with them].

It is said *"he who knows himself knows his Lord."* For when one realizes his own limitations, he knows more of the power of Allah (swt), and he [learns] not to rely on himself and his own intellect. Instead, he places his trust in Allah (swt) and seeks the truth from Him and those who rely on Allah (swt), He suffices them and will guide them along the straight path.

He who possesses wealth should not be miserly. In fact, it is necessary to seek refuge in Allah (swt) from miserliness. The Prophet (saw) said, *"What affliction is worse than miserliness?"* The father of imam al-Hulwani was poor and sold sweets. He used to give sweets to the scholars of law and implore that they pray for his son. By virtue of his generosity, trust, and supplication, his son attained [eminence as a scholar].

With wealth one can buy books, as well as concern himself with having books written, for this aids in [attaining] knowledge and learning. Imam Muhammad ibn Hasan (r) had so much wealth that he had over 300 caretakers looking after his assets. Subsequently, he spent all of his wealth toward the pursuit of knowledge. [In face], he did not retain a single valuable garment. So when Abu Yusuf (r) saw him dressed in shabby clothe, he sent him some splendid clothe. But he [ash-Shaybani] refused them saying, "Good come to you in advance; but not for us, they are deferred [until the hereafter]. Although the acceptance of a gift is in accordance with the Prophet's sunnah, he refured these clothes perhaps because he saw it as an abasement of himself. The prophet (saw) said, *"Believers are not allowed to debase themselves."*

It is reported that the scholar Fakr-ul-Islam al-Arsabandi collected the rinds of melons that were discarded. Subsequently, he washed and ate them. A bondmaid saw him and informed her master. He then told her to prepare a meal for [al-Arsabandi] and invited him to dine, but Arsabandi did not accept [since he felt it would abase him].

So it is essential in the quest for knowledge that one pursue the highest aspiration without coveting the wealth of people. The prophet (saw) said, *"Beware of being covetous for it is ever-present poverty."* Likewise, one should never be miserly

with whatever wealth he has; instead let one spend it on himself or on others. It is said, *"People are in poverty because they fear poverty."* Long ago, people used to learn handicrafts and [simultaneously] pursue knowledge, so that they would not covet the wealth of other people. In the [Book of] Wisdom it is said, "He who seeks to grow rich from the wealth of men becomes poor." A scholar who becomes covetous no longer preserves the integrity of knowledge and no longer speaks the truth. And for this reason did [the Prophet (saw) said:], "The deliverer of sacred Law seeks refuge in Allah (swt) from [covetousness], saying, 'I take refuge in Allah (swt) from covetousness which leads to disgrace'."

It is essential for believers not to hope [for anything] unless it comes from Allah (swt) and not to fear anything except from Allah (swt) Himself. [In ignoring this], one violates the ordinances of the Law, since he who sins against Allah (swt) out of fear of human beings actually fears someone other than Allah (swt). But if one does not sin against Allah (swt) out of fear of his fellow men, and thus observes the ordinances of sacred Law, then he fears no one other than Allah (swt). The same principle applies to hope.

It is necessary in seeking knowledge that one enumerate [compute] and measure for oneself the amount of repetition [required to learn a lesson], for one's mind is not at ease until it attains this [appropriate] amount. It is further necessary to repeat yesterday's lesson five times; the lesson of the preceding day four times; the lesson of the prior day three times; the one prior to that two times, and that of the day before one time. This ensures that [the lesson is] kept in memory. And it is essential not to become accustomed to repeating [things] silently, since it is necessary that learning and repetition be carried on with vigor and enthusiasm, lest one break the habit of repetition. It is not necessary to speak in a loud voice when talking to oneself, for this too impedes repetition. [It is said], *"The best of way is the middle course."* It is reported that Abu Yusuf vigorously and enthusiastically discussed matters of jurisprudence with learned men. And his son-in-law accompanied him and marveled at his performance. He said, *"I know that he has been hungry for five days; and still, he discusses with vigor and enthusiasm."*

It is essential that there be no [abrupt] intermission in the pursuit of learning, for this is indeed harmful. It was our teacher, Imam Burhan-ud-Din, who said, "I became superior to my companions because I took no intermission in my pursuits." It was reported by Shaykh-ul-Islam Ali al-Asbijabi that there occurred during the time of his studies a break [in his formal schooling] during a period of twelve years because of the overthrow of the government. So he left the country with his companion he used to debate with, and did not cease his discussions. The two of them used to sit [together] for discussion each day and did not neglect this during this twelve-year period. Later his companion became the venerable Shaykh al-Islam for the Shafi'ites.

Imam Fakhr-ul-Islam Qadikhan said, *"It is important in studying sacred Law to memorize one particular book of law constantly, so that afterwords it will be easy for one to retain whatever legal information one hears."* Hence we should strive to memorize a muktasar (compendium) in whatever Madhab we have espoused.

Relying on Allah (swt)

It is necessary in the quest for knowledge that one rely entirely on Allah (swt) and not be worried about matters [like] material sustenance; one should not occupy one's mind with [such concerns]. Imam al-A'dham [the greatest Imam] Abu Hanifa (r) related what he heard from 'Abdullah ibn al-Hasan al-Zabidi, *"A person who devotes himself to learning Allah (swt)'s religion, Allah (swt) gives him sufficient care and provides for him in unexpected ways."* So he who occupies himself with matters of sustenance, such as food and clothing, is not yet free enough for the acquisition of noble traits and elevated matters, [like knowledge and scholarship].

It is said [derisively], *"Renounce noble matters and do not journey to seek them. Remain instead where you are, for you are zealous for food and clothing."*

A man said to Mansur al-Hallaj, *"Give me sound advice."* He said, *"[My advice] concerns your own soul. If you do not keep it occupied it will keep you occupied."* It is necessary, therefore, for everyone to occupy himself with good deeds so that the soul does not concern itself with [mundane] desires. The intelligent man should not be eager for the affairs of this world, since this kind of anxiety and grief does not avert calamity and is really of no use. It is harmful, in fact, to the spirit, the mind, and the body. [Working for the world] causes a cessation of good deeds. So one should attend to matters pertaining to the Hereafter, since these [matters] prove beneficial. As for [the Prophet's] saying *"There are sins whose only punishment is through concerning [oneself] with earthly life."* this means only a measure of concern for the affairs of this world] such that it does not interfere with doing good deeds or occupy [one's] presence of mind during Prayer. For indeed this [minimum] amount of concern and effort [for this world] actually pertains to the deeds related to the Hereafter.

It is essential in the search for knowledge to reduce one's attachment to worldly affairs as much as one can. Therefore, [students] elect to go abroad [in order to acquire knowledge]. One should bear patiently with the labors and hardships in

the journey of learning, just as Moses (pbuh) said during [his] journey for knowledge, *"Indeed, we have found fatigue in this journey of ours"* [quran, 18: 61]. These words did not issue from him concerning any other kind of journey [other than that for learning]. This shows that the journey for knowledge is not without difficulty and that knowledge is a very serious affair. According to most learned men, [seeking knowledge] is more excellent than battling enemies. [Divine] recompense is determined by the amount of toil and labor [one exerts]. So he who perseveres in this [toil and labor] will encounter such delight in gaining knowledge that it overcomes all other delights of this world.

On this matter, Imam Muhammad ibn al-Hasan (r) [Imam Abu Hanifa's deciple] used to say when he spent nights awake solving difficult problems, *"How far removed are the sons of kings from these [unspeakable] delights!"*

It is obligatory for the student not to be occupied with anything else but knowledge and never turn away from learning. Muhammad ibn al-Hasan (r) said, *"Indeed, this trade of [scholarship] goes on from cradle to grave; so he who wishes to refrain from this pursuit of knowledge for even one hour, might as well leave it entirely this very hour."*

The learned jurist [Ibrahim ibn al-Jarrah] came to Abu Yusuf (r) [his teacher] to visit him during his mortal illness, when [Abu Yusuf] was very close to his death. Abu Yusuf asked him, *"Is the throwing of stones [during Hajj] on horseback superior to the throwing of stones on foot?"* When [Ibrahim ibn al-Jarrah] did not know the answer, Abu Yusuf provided the answer himself — namely, the early authorities preferred the throwing of stones on foot.

This illustrates that the scholar is one who concerns himself with study at all times. In this way does one partake in the great delight found in this [pursuit]. And it was said that after his death, Muhammad [ibn al-Hasan] appeared to someone in a dream and was asked, *"What were you doing when you were about to pass away?"* He answered, *"I was reflecting on a certain [legal] issue concerning a bondservant buying his freedom. I didn't even notice the departure of my soul [from my body]."* At the very end of his life, Muhammad [ibn al-Hasan] said [out of utter humility], *"The question of a bondservant buying his own freedom has occupied me from preparing for this day."*

The Time for the Acquisition of Knowledge

The time for learning extends from cradle to grave. Hasan ibn Ziyad [disciple of Abu Hanifa (r)], who reached the age of eighty years, had taken up the study of theology and juresprudence, and over a period of forty years, he never spent the night stretched out on a mattress. Then for the next forty years he gave legal opinions.

The best period [in life for study] is at the beginning of adolescence. [The best time] is the time of dawn and that between the setting of the sun and the first Prayer vigil of the night. It is necessary to fully immerse oneself in the study of knowledge at all times. But if one becomes over-fatigued by a given discipline, then he should move on to another. Whenever he became tired of speaking, Ibn Abbas (r) used to say, *"Hand me the collections of the poets."* Muhammad ibn al-Hasan (r) did not sleep a night without placing before him various texts; when he got fatigued with one of them, he looked into another. And he drove away sleep with [cold] water, for he used to say, *"Sleep is induced by heat."*

Helpfulness and Good Advice

A person of knowledge must be sympathetic and helpful rather than jealous, for envy is injurious and devoid of benefit. Shaykh-ul-Islam Burhan-ud-Din used to say, *"The son of the learned man will be learned himself because the man of knowledge earnestly desires that his disciples become scholars. So through the blessing that comes from his conviction and compassion, his son too will become learned."* And it is reported that Burhan-ud-Din Abdul-Aziz ibn Umar ibn Maza fixed the time for study with his sons, as-Sadr ash-Shahid Husam ad-Din and as-Sadr as-Sa'id Taj ad-Din, at the height of late morning after [the completion] of all his [other] lessons. But [the sons] said: "Our natural faculties are tired and worn out at that time." So their father replied, *"Foreigners and the sons of the great have come to me from various regions of the earth. I must tend to their instruction first."* Through the blessing of his benevolence, his sons became scholars superior to most of the learned of their day.

It is necessary not to enter into a litigation [lawsuit] with anyone nor have an altercation with him, for this is time consuming. It is said that whoever does good to others is rewarded because of his beneficence, while he who does evil, his evil deeds suffice him [as a punishment].

Imam Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr, known as Imam Khawahir Zada al-Mufti, told me, "The Master of Sacred Law, Yusuf al-Hamadani, recited this verse to me, *"Do not punish a man for his misdeeds - his character and deeds are sufficient [punishment] for him."*

It is also said that he who wishes to humiliate his enemy by showing his superiority to him let him repeat these verses. *"If you wish to see your enemy upon the ground and to slay him with grief and inflame him with worry, - Then strive for the*

noblest [of gains] and increase your knowledge more and more. Indeed, he who adds to his knowledge increases the sorrow of the man who envies him."

But you must apply yourself toward things that are beneficial to your soul, not to ward the conquering of your enemy. For if you concern yourself with things that benefit your soul, this guarantees conquest over your enemy. But beware of hostile action, for this will cover you with shame and waste your time. Furthermore, you must bear injustice patiently, especially if it comes from the fools. Isa, son of Maryam (Peace be upon them both) said, *"Bear once [patience] with a fool so you may gain tenfold [reward from Allah (swt)]."*

A poem of unknown authorship was recited to me: *"I put men to the test one generation after another, - and I did not see anything but trickery and prattle. - Nor did I find any trial more hurtful - and harder to bear than the mutual hostility of men. - And I tasted the bitterness of things everywhere, - and there was nothing more bitter than begging."*

Beware not to think evil of a believer, for this produces hostility. This is not at all permissible according to the statement of the [Prophet (saw)], *"Think well of believers."* Indeed, [evil thinking] springs from malignity of intent and wickedness of the character.

It is just as Abu't-Tayyib [al-Mutanabbi] said: *"If the deeds of a man are evil, then his thoughts are evil and believes whatever suspicion haunts him. He makes enemies of his friends on the basis of what their enemies say; and he plunges into a dark night of doubt."*

Another poem of unknown authorship was recited to me: *"Draw away from the vile person and do not seek him out; - but to he whom you have dispensed good, increase this. - You may protect yourself against every treachery of your enemy; - but when the enemy plots, do not plot against him."*

A poem by the Shaykh al-ʻAmid Abu'l-Fath al-Busti was recited to me: *"The intelligent man is not safe from an ignorant fool who besets him with tribulation and annoyance. Let [the wise] choose calm over belligerence and remain silent when one shouts."*

Useful Means for the Attainment of Know ledge

A person in pursuit of knowledge should seek it at all times, so that he may eventually attain excellence. One way to attain knowledge is to have ink available to [the seeker] at every occasion so that he can jot down whatever knowledge he hears. It is said that he who simply tries to memorize [what he has heard, the lesson will] flee; but he who writes it down stands firm. It is [also] said that knowledge is that which is taken from the lips of men, since they recall only the best of what they heard and mention only the best of what they recall.

As-Sadr ash-Shahid Husam ad-Din made the recommendation to his son Shams-ud-Din that he commit to memory a moderate amount of knowledge and wisdom every day, such that it will grow and become significant in a short period of time.

Isam ibn Yusuf purchased for himself a reed-pen for one dinar in order to immediately write down whatever matter he heard, for life is short and knowledge extensive. It is necessary not to waste time or hours but make use of nights as well as periods of retirement.

Yahya ibn Mu'adh ar-Razi is reported to have said, *"The night [is long so do not shorten it by sleeping - and the day is brilliant, so do not obscure it with your sins."*

It is necessary to benefit from learned men and acquire information from them, for it's not possible to attain what escapes, just as our teacher Shaykh-ul-Islam said with respect to his venerable colleagues and teachers, *"How many learned men have I come across without consulting them sufficiently."* And I state that this kind of missed opportunity is the source of the verse, *"Alas for a meeting missed, alas! - Nothing that has passed by and vanished can be obtained [again]."*

ʻAli [ibn Abi Talib (r)] said, *"If you are occupied with [learning] something, then concentrate on it wholeheartedly. To withdraw from [the study of] the knowledge of Allah (swt) is shameful and a big loss; so seek refuge in Allah (swt) from this [distraction] both night and day."*

It is essential for the student of knowledge to bear patiently with miseries and humiliation while seeking learning. Flattery is blameworthy except in the quest of knowledge. In order to attain information, flattery of the scholar and one's associates cannot be helped.

It is said that knowledge is nobility without debasement. But no one reaches it except through debasement, in which there is no nobility. Someone [else] has said, *"I see that you desire to ennoble your soul; but you will not attain nobility before you have humbled [your soul]."*

Abstinence During the Pursuit of Learning

A certain author related a tradition under the heading [of this chapter], *"He who does not exert abstinence while learning, Allah (swt) chastises [him] in one of three ways: either he deprives him of life in his youth or exiles him into [far-off] regions, or punishes him [by forcing him to enter] the service of the Sultan."*

The more abstinent a seeker of knowledge is, the more useful his knowledge becomes. Moreover, his learning becomes easier and the acquisition of beneficial matters more expansive. In part, abstinence is to guard against satiety [fullness of the stomach], much sleep, and abundant talk about useless matters. One must also beware of eating food in the marketplace if possible, because food of the market is more apt to be impure and contaminated. Eating in the market is further removed from the contemplation of Allah (swt) and closer to being heedless of Him. Moreover, the eyes of the needy fall upon the food [in the marketplace]; while the needy are unable to purchase anything. As a result, they are further harmed, and the blessing of the food vanishes.

It is related by Imam al-Jalil Muhammad ibn al-Fadl that when he was in the process of gaining knowledge, he did not eat food of the marketplace. Once before, however, his father prepared a meal for him and brought it to him on Friday. When he saw bread from the marketplace in [his son's] home, he refused to address him because of his displeasure with him. His son then give him the excuse, *"I myself did not bring it nor did I get satisfaction out of it. It was a friend of mine who brought it." His father replied, "Had you been on guard and self-restraining in matters like this, your friend would not have ventured to do this."*

In this way were [serious students] abstinent. As a result, they were successful in attaining knowledge and in spreading [their learning] far and wide, such that their names shall last [in public renown] until the Day of Judgment.

A certain educated man among the learned ascetics admonished a student saying, *"You must be on guard against slander and keeping company with the loquacious."* He further said, *"He who talks much robs you of your life and wastes your time*." In being abstinent, [therefore], one must avoid [associating with] corrupt and sinful people and those negligent [of their religious duties]. One must [instead] choose to associate with the righteous; for without doubt, proximity leaves its traces.

[Furthermore], one should sit facing Makkah and be an adherent of the exemplary way of the prophet (saw). One should also enlist the supplication of good people while avoiding those of the trespassers.

It is reported that two men abroad in quest of knowledge and were companions in learning. Subsequently, they returned to their native land. One of them had become a legist, while the other had not. The jurists of this land pondered this matter and investigated their situations, their method of retaining their lessons, and how they sat when studying. They were informed that the one who mastered law sat in a certain way, while he often repeated what he learnt; he also faced the Qibla and the city in which he had gathered his knowledge. However, the other man turned his back to the Qibla and [turned] his face away from this city. So these theologians and legists agreed that a jurist masters the study of law [in part] through the blessing of turning in the direction of the qibla, since this is the traditional way of sitting except under compulsion to do otherwise. [Students also learn] through the blessing of Muslims making supplication for them. For the city of [a successful student's] studies is not devoid of pious men and good people, and it is clear that a pious man prays for him at night.

It is necessary in the quest for learning not to neglect [both] the etiquette [adab] and the practice of the prophet (saw), for whoever is negligent of the etiquette is likewise deprived of the practice of the Prophet (saw), and he who neglects the practice of the Prophet (saw) is deprived of the fulfillment of his legal obligations. Moreover, he who is deprived of the fulfillment of his legal obligations is denied [goodness] in the Hereafter.

It is essential that one engage much in Prayer [Salat] and that the Prayers be performed with humility, for this indeed helps in study and the acquisition of knowledge. A poem was recited to me by the illustrious shaykh Najm-ud-Din Umar ibn Muhammad an-Nasafi: *"Be observant of commands and prohibitions - and be assiduous and observant of the Prayer. -Seek knowledge of the divine law - and be diligent and procure help through good deeds; - then you will become a legist, a guardian of the law. - Ask Allah (swt) that He preserve your memory, - hoping for its excellence, for Allah (swt) is supreme in remembering."*

He further said: "Be obedient and work diligently and do not become lazy. - Thus will you return to your Lord. - And do not sleep at night, for the best of people, - Only little of the night do they lay.

It is important that one carry with him a book under any circumstance in order to read it. It is said that he who does not have a book in his sleeve, wisdom shall not be firmly established in his heart. It is likewise essential that in the book there be blank pages and that one carry ink in order to write down what one hears.

Memory and Forgetfulness

The most influential factors in [strengthening] memory are industriousness and commitment. Reducing one's consumption [food and drink], [increasing] Prayer at night, and reading the Quran are also factors for [improving] one's memory. It is said that nothing increases memory retention more than reading the Quran silently; and reading the Quran silently is most excellent, for [the Prophet (saw)] said, *"The most excellent among the works of my community is the recitation of the Quran silently."*

Ash-Shaddad ibn Hakim saw one of his deceased brothers in his dream and said to him, *"What thing did you find the most useful for your Afterlife?"* He replied, *"Reading the Quran silently"*

One should say when lifting the Quran, *"In the name of Allah (swt), and glory be to Allah (swt), and praise be to Allah (swt), and there is no god worthy of worship save Allah (swt), and Allah (swt) is the greatest, and there is no power or strength except in Allah (swt), the Exalted, the Mighty, who knows the number of all the letters that ever were [written] and that ever shall be written throughout the centuries and ages."*

And let it be said after each prescribed [Prayer], *"I believe in Allah (swt), the One, the Unique, the Truth, who has no companion; and I do not believe in any [deity] besides Him."* [One] should also pray much [that Allah (swt) send] blessings and peace upon the Prophet (saw), for he is a mercy to the worlds (Quran, 21:107).

It is said in a poem: *"I complained to Waki ibn al-Jarrah [celebrated Muhaddith] of my bad memory. So he directed me to cease from evil doing; For indeed memory is a favor from Allah (swt) and a favor of Allah (swt) is not given to he who sins."*

Using the tooth-stick [siwak], drinking honey, eating the incense plant [hellebore] with sugar, and eating 21 red raisins a day on an empty stomach generates good memory, since [these things] cure many sicknesses and illnesses. For everything that diminishes phlegm and bodily fluid increases memory, and everything that augments phlegm induces forgetfulness.

Moreover, among those things that bring about forgetfulness are wrongdoing, committing many sins, harboring worries and anxiety over worldly matters, and being distracted by many occupations and attachments. We have mentioned previously that it is not befitting for an intelligent man to overly concern himself with worldly matters since they are harmful and are of no real benefit. Worldly anxieties create darkness in the heart, but concern for the Hereafter brings light into the heart. [This light] becomes apparent through Prayer. Anxiety for worldly affairs impedes one from doing good, while concern for the Hereafter incites one to do good, as does occupying oneself with Prayer in a spirit of humility and presence of mind.

The acquisition of learning drives out concern and sorrow, just as Imam Nasr ibn al-Hasan al-Marghinani said in one of his poems: *"Find your wealth, O Nasr ibn al-Hasan, in all [branches of] learning which can be amassed. These will keep sorrow away. Nothing else can be relied on [to do so]."*

Imam Najm-ud-Din 'Umar ibn Muhammad an-Nasafi said in one of his poems: *Farewell greetings to her who enslaved me through her elegance, the splendor of her cheeks, and the furtive glances of her eyes. A charming young maiden captivated me and filled me with love. Imagination is confounded in describing her [charms]. But I said [to her]: "Leave me and excuse me, for indeed I have become enamored with knowledge and it's unveiling. And for me seeking knowledge, learning, and reverence of Allah (swt) suffices me over the song of singing maidens and their perfume."*

One's Livelihood and One's Life

The student of learning must have sustenance and have knowledge of those things which increase it. [The student should know as well] what augments life and health in order to be free from [other] occupations and thus [devote himself] to the pursuit of knowledge alone. Books have been written describing these matters; so briefly I will cite only some [points concerning this].

The Messenger (saw) said, *"The decrees of Allah (swt) are not averted except by supplication, and your span of life is not augmented except through piety. For a man is deprived of sustenance because of a sin he has committed."* This statement establishes for certain that the perpetration of sin is the cause of sustenance deprivation, especially in the case of telling lies which brings about poverty.

There is a specific hadith that establishes this [effect of lying]. Sleep in the morning cuts off sustenance. In fact, an overabundance of sleep brings about poverty and a dearth of learning as well. Somebody said, *"The joy of man lies in putting on [fine] clothes; [whereas] garnering knowledge is [achieved] through leaving off sleeping."* Someone else said, *"Is it not a great loss that nights pass without use and yet they are considered part of my life?"* Another yet said, *"You*

there, get up this night! Perhaps you will be well-guided! How long will you sleep through your night while your life is consumed?"

To sleep naked and urinate naked; to eat in a state of impurity and to eat lying down on one's side on a couch; to neglect the food remnants on the table; to burn up the skins of onion and garlic; to sweep the house in the night and leave the sweepings in the house; to go ahead of venerable old people [or learned men]; call one's parents by their given names; the using of toothpicks made of every kind of wood [while only bitter wood should be used]; washing the hand with mud and earth; sitting on the doorstep; lying on one's side against one of the door posts; making sacred ablutions in the latrine; sewing clothes on one's body; drying one's face with clothes; leaving spider webs in the house; neglecting Prayers; making a hasty exit from the mosque after the Morning Prayers; going to the market very early and being late in returning from it; buying pieces of bread from poor people; begging; invoking evil on one's children; to leave off covering vessels; and extinguishing the lantern by blowing at it [with one's breath]— all of this can bring about poverty. This is known through traditions going back to Prophet Muhammad (saw).

Likewise to write with a knotted reed-pen; to comb oneself with a broken comb; being negligent in supplicating for one's parents; to be seated while winding one's turban around the head; to put on one's trousers standing up; having avarice, miserliness, or extravagance; having laziness, sluggishness, and neglect in one's affairs — all lead to poverty.

The Messenger (saw) said, *"Giving charity brings about [from Allah (swt)] your sustenance."* Early rising is blessed since it increases all kinds of good things, especially sustenance. Beauty in handwriting is among the keys to securing sustenance. Also a merry expression of the face and wholesome speech increase sustenance.

According to al-Hasan ibn Ali [ibn Abi Talib] (May Allah be pleased with them both), sweeping the courtyard and washing cooking vessels lead to riches. Yet the most influential factor in bringing about sustenance is the performance of Prayer with reverence, humility, modesty, and proper positioning of the body - as are the rest of the obligatory aspects, traditional rites, and accepted practices pertaining to [Prayer].

The Midmorning Prayer [Duha] is a very well-known act [associated with provision]; as are reading Surah al-Waqi'a, particularly at night when [one usually] sleeps, and reading Surah al-Mulk, Surah al-Muzzammil, Surah al-Layl, and Surat al-Inshirah [ash-Sharh]

[It is also helpful] to be present in the Mosque before the Call to Prayer [Adhan], have constancy in purification, and perform at home the supererogatory [non-obligatory] Prayer that precedes the Dawn Prayer, as well as the Witr Prayer [at night]. [Furthermore], one should not speak of mundane matters after the Witr Prayer.

Nor should one frequently sit in the company of women unless it is necessary. One should not engage in vain discourse that is of no benefit to one's religious or worldly affairs.

It is said that whoever occupies himself with insignificant things, then important things will bypass him. Buzurjmihr said, *"When you see a man who speaks too much, be persuaded that he is insane."* And ‘Ali (r) [ibn Abl Talib] said, *"When intelligence is complete, then speech becomes rare."*

On this subject the following verse occurred to me: *"When a person's intelligence is complete, his speech becomes rare. Be sure of the stupidity of a man if he speaks too much."*

Somebody else said: *"Speech is a necessary evil, but silence is salvation. So when you have to talk, do not be abundant. You will never once repent of your silence, but oftentimes you will repent of your speech."*

Also one's sustenance is increased if he [or she] does the following:

- Recite each day from the moment of daybreak to the time of Dawn Prayer [Fajr] starts a hundred times: *"Glory be to Allah (swt), the Exalted. Glory be to Allah (swt) and all praise. I seek forgiveness from Allah (swt) and turn to him penitently."*
- Say every day in the morning and evening one hundred times: *"There is deity worthy of worship but Allah (swt), the King, the Truth, the Elucidator."*
- Say after Dawn (Fajr) and Dusk (Maghrib) Prayers each day thirty-three times: *"Praise be to Allah (swt), and glory be to Allah (swt), and there is no deityworthy of worship save Allah (swt), and Allah (swt) is the greatest!"*
- Seek forgiveness from Allah (swt), the Exalted, forty [or seventy] times after the Dawn Prayer and one should frequently repeat the words: *"There is no strength nor power except in Allah (swt) the Most High, the Greatest; and blessings and peace be on the Prophet (saw)."*
- Say every Friday seventy times: *"O Allah (swt)! Make me content with those things You have made permissible as opposed to those things You have made prohibited. And make me satisfied with Your favor to the exclusion of anybody else's."*

- Say the following in praise of [Allah (swt)] every day and night: *"You are Allah (swt), the Most Glorious and the Wise; You are Allah (swt), the King, the Holy; You are Allah (swt), the Forbearing, the Generous; You are Allah (swt), the Creator of all; You are Allah (swt), the Creator of Paradise and Hellfire; You are the Knower of the unseen and seen, Knower of all secrets and hidden matters; You are the Greatest, the Most Exalted; You are Allah (swt), the Creator of everything and to You do all things revert; You are Allah (swt), the Judge on the Day of Judgment; never did You cease nor will you ever cease. You are Allah (swt), there is no God but You; You are Allah (swt), the Unique, the Eternal; He begets not, nor is He begotten. And there is none who compares with Him. You are Allah (swt), there is no Allah (swt) but You, the Merciful, the Mercy-Giving. You are Allah (swt), there is no Allah God save You, the King, the Holy, the Peace, the Trustworthy, the Guardian, the Powerful, the Omnipotent, the Sublime. There is no god but You, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner, to whom belong the most beautiful names. Everything in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him. And He is the Mighty, the Wise."*

Increase in the span of life is further owed to piety and to leaving off what brings about harm. One should also venerate the elders and preserve relations with one's kin. One should say at the time of dawn and at dusk everyday three times: *"Glory be to Allah (swt) who fills the scale of judgment, the ultimate limit of knowledge, the highest measure of satisfaction, and the weighty occupant of the throne."*

One should beware of cutting down green trees unless it is necessary. One should also preform ablution thoroughly and perform prayer with heartfelt glorification [of Allah (swt)]. One should also read the Quran and go to both Hajj and Umra. In addition, one should preserve good relations with one's fellowmen.

It is necessary that one learn something of medicine and obtain blessings of the traditions of prophet Muhammad (saw) handed down to us concerning medicine. Imam Abul Abbas al Mustaghfiri has collected a book called, The Medicine of the prophet (saw) [Tibb an-Nabi]. Whoever looks for this book will find it.

May the blessings of Allah (swt) be upon his beloved Muhammad (saw), the seal of the noble envoys, and on his kin and his companions, the outstanding leaders of the community, forever and ever; Ameen!